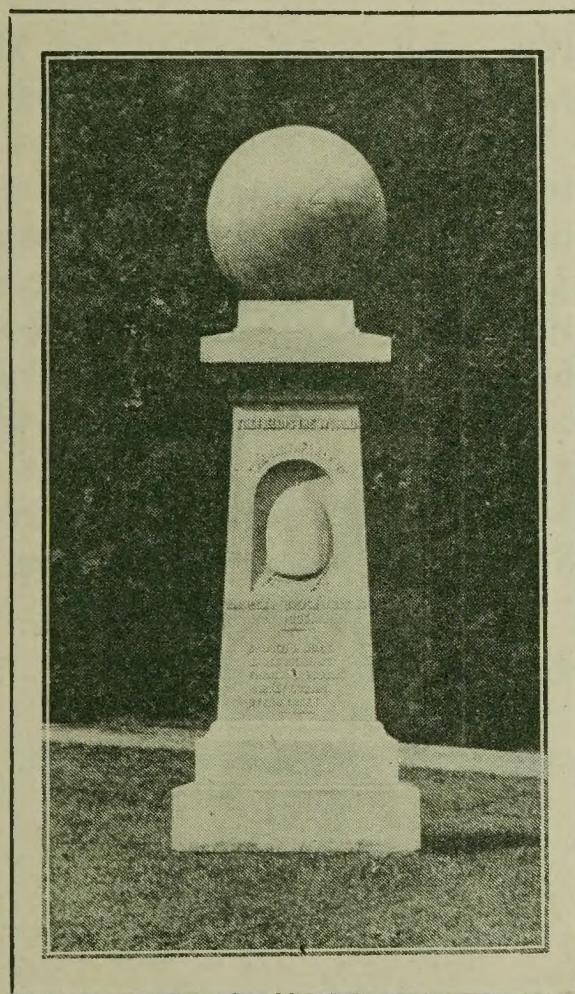


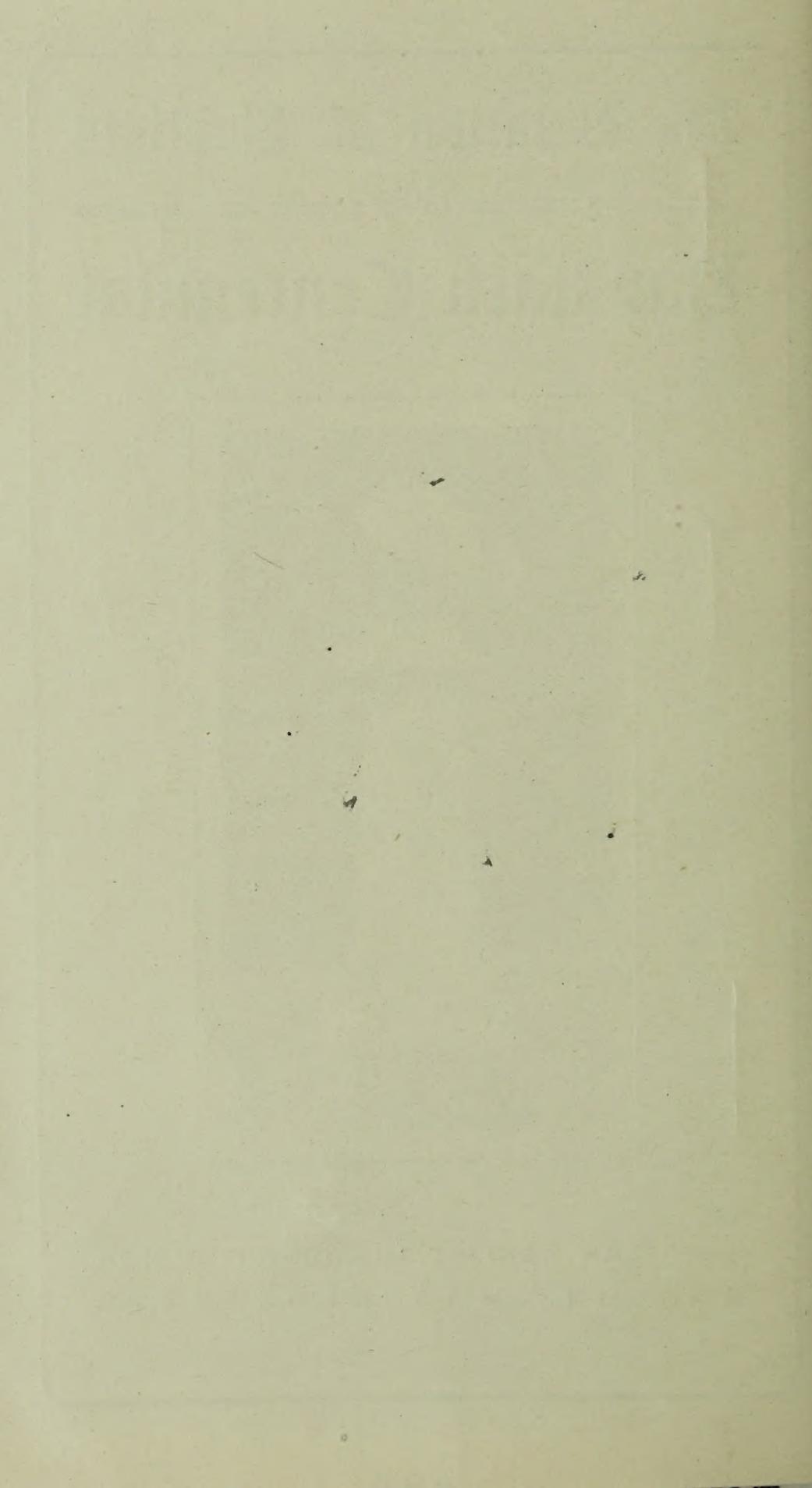
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# The Relation of Baptists to the Haystack Centennial



AMERICAN BAPTIST MISSIONARY UNION  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS



# The Relation of Baptists

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# to the

# Haystack Centennial

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**O**N a grassy lawn, now within the limits of Williamstown, Mass., is a spot which has long been of interest to lovers of missions, for it was here that a company of students from Williams College met one summer afternoon, just one hundred years ago, under the shelter of a haystack, and talked and prayed about sending the gospel to the heathen. The place is marked by a monument surmounted by a globe, and is inscribed on one side with these words, above and below a haystack carved out of the marble:

THE FIELD IS THE WORLD  
THE BIRTHPLACE OF  
AMERICAN FOREIGN MISSIONS  
1806  
SAMUEL J. MILLS  
JAMES RICHARDS  
FRANCIS L. ROBBINS  
HARVEY LOOMIS  
BYRAN GREEN

The one hundredth anniversary of this occasion is being fittingly commemorated by The American Board of Commissioners

for Foreign Missions, the society which was the direct outcome of this early interest; but the event itself was fraught with such deep significance to the Church as a whole that this centennial occasion is of vital interest to every denomination.

### The Haystack Prayer Meeting

The circumstances of the little meeting were these. As the result of a deep religious awakening which had made itself felt in Williamstown in common with many other localities, it became the custom of a number of students in Williams College to meet every Wednesday afternoon for prayer in the valley south of the college. Sometimes when they had more leisure they would go to a grove in the opposite direction. It was in this latter direction that five young men wended their way upon that historic afternoon, but a thunderstorm led them to leave the grove and take refuge under a haystack in a field near by. The subject of conversation turned upon the moral darkness of Asia, and Samuel Mills, the leading spirit in the group, proposed to send the gospel to that dark, heathen land, uttering the words which have since become a missionary classic, "We can do it if we will." The names of the five young men present are those inscribed upon the monument. Each one offered a prayer, four of the five making foreign missions the

burden of their petitions. The meetings continued throughout that year and the next, and the subject of missions to the heathen was always kept in the foreground. Thus, as has been said, "the first personal consecrations to the work of effecting missions among foreign heathen nations on the part of American youth" were made at Williamstown on that afternoon one hundred years ago.

### The Brethren

It was about two years later, on September 7, 1808, when two of the original five, Samuel J. Mills and James Richards, together with Ezra Fiske, John Seward and Luther Rice, signed the constitution of The Brethren. This was a secret organization, the purpose of which was "to effect in the persons of its members a mission or missions to the heathen." Each member pledged himself not only "to keep inviolably secret the existence of this society," but also to "keep absolutely free from any engagement which shall be deemed incompatible with the object of this society" and to "hold himself in readiness to go on a mission when and where duty may call." Two years later, when the members entered the seminary at Andover, the organization was transferred there, and the names of Adoniram Judson, Jr., Samuel Newell and Samuel Nott, Jr., were added to the roll.

### *The Relation of Baptists*

From the time that Judson joined The Brethren he appears to have become the leading spirit among them, but one impulse moved them all and they were exceedingly active in their efforts to kindle missionary enthusiasm among the churches and ministers wherever they went. The secrecy of their organization grew out of a general lack of sympathy on the part of many of the churches of that day with what appeared to be such Utopian plans. The society flourished, however, for many years, and proved to be one of the influential organizations of history, its membership from Mills to Neesima having included many noted missionaries.

Not many years after the organization of The Brethren a similar society came into existence in our Baptist seminary at Hamilton, N. Y., and many of our early missionaries were members of it.\* Surely the spirit that actuated the students of those early days is the same that has led in our day to the Student Volunteer Movement. The unity and cooperation which characterize our times were impossible seventy-five or one hundred years ago, when the difficulties of travel were so great; but the spirit was none the less earnest.

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\*This institution has made a remarkable record for the number of missionaries it has sent forth. A recent memorial published by Colgate University gives the names of one hundred and twenty-six who have been students in its various schools who have entered foreign missionary service.

## Early Missionary Interest

It would be erroneous to conclude, however, that interest in the cause of missions among American Christians began with the haystack prayer meeting. It is well known that as early as May 28, 1799, an association was formed in Boston among the Congregationalists under the name of the Massachusetts Missionary Society, the object of which was "to diffuse the gospel among the people of the newly settled and remote parts of our country, among the Indians, and through more distant regions of the earth as circumstances shall invite." Other states organized similar societies. The Presbyterians for some years previous to 1800 had shown a growing interest in missions, and in 1805 the General Assembly began the publication of the *Missionary Magazine or Religious Intelligencer*. In 1806, Rev. Dr. Griffin delivered the annual missionary sermon before the General Assembly in Philadelphia, and urged the claims of the heathen with an eloquence which has seldom been surpassed. Interest in the work of Dr. Carey in India seems to have been quite general in various denominations, and considerable sums of money were sent him from time to time. During the years 1806 and 1807 the receipt of \$6,000 from American churches was acknowledged by him.

## Interest Among Baptists

There is considerable evidence that a deep interest in missions prevailed in many of our Baptist churches from an early date. Being widely scattered and having no general organization, the associations were the chief exponent of Baptist thought. The minutes of these meetings were for a long time the sole periodical literature of the denomination, but these were widely and carefully read. From many of these early records it is evident that prayer for the world-wide extension of the gospel was quite general. Such references as these occur frequently:

The Warren Association in 1787 "spent some time in prayer for a revival of religion in our churches and throughout the world."

The Stonington, Conn., Association recommends that the members of the churches spend some definite time every Lord's Day in prayer to God that "he will be graciously pleased to cause a general spread of the gospel among the nations of the earth." In a letter addressed to other associations it exhorts, "may we with one heart unitedly pray that God will make more abundant displays of gospel grace till the whole earth shall be filled with his glory and praise."

The monthly concert of prayer, which originated in England in 1784, was soon adopted by churches in this country also.

and had much to do with quickening the spiritual life which was the necessary antecedent of a deep interest in missions. Fortunately there were among the ministry quite a number of stalwart personalities who were in close touch with leading Baptists of England. Among these none was more influential than Rev. William Staughton, D. D., pastor of the Sansom Street Church, Philadelphia, a man of such eminent ability that he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Princeton University at the age of twenty-eight. He had come from England, where he had been the friend and associate of the most intimate friends of missions there. He was in frequent correspondence with several of them, and was perhaps the most direct channel by which their spirit was diffused among our American churches. Many of our early ministers were his students in theology, and they imbibed in a happy degree his characteristic sentiments. When, in the course of events, the Baptists organized a foreign missionary society. Dr. Staughton was elected to the office of corresponding secretary.

### State Missionary Societies

In common with other denominations state missionary societies began to be formed, primarily for the purpose of send-

## The Relation of Baptists

ing preachers to frontier regions beyond the limits of their own state, and establishing missions to the Indians. The New York Missionary Society was an interdenominational society, organized about 1796, which for years conducted a successful mission among the Indians through the work of a Baptist minister, Rev. Elkanah Holmes. An early director of this society was Rev. John Williams, a Welshman, who had settled in New York and was the successful pastor of the Fayette Street Baptist Church. From time to time there came to New York missionaries from England on their way to India. The East India Company refused to carry them in their ships, so they were obliged to seek passage from American ports. Mr. Williams became deeply interested in them and in the work in India, and as early as 1800 addressed a letter to Dr. Carey himself, in which he told him something of the work of the New York Missionary Society. This opened the way for a long and intensely interesting correspondence between them, and Dr. Carey took a lively interest in the work of Mr. Holmes. The news contained in these missionary epistles was widely circulated and was a very real force in the early awakening of missionary interest among our churches. The English missionaries continued to journey to and from India by way of our shores and their

ardent zeal was not lost upon American churches. In 1806 the Baptists withdrew from the New York Missionary Society and formed the New York Baptist Missionary Society, with Rev. John Williams as its first president. The treasurer was a deacon of his church, John Cauldwell, who became the first treasurer of the General Convention, the society which later came to be known as The American Baptist Missionary Union.

The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society was organized in 1802, and seems to have been the first state society consisting of Baptist churches alone. The object was stated to be "to furnish occasional preaching and to promote the knowledge of evangelistic truth in the new settlements within these United States, or further, if circumstances should render it proper." The following year the publication was authorized of the **BAPTIST MISSIONARY MAGAZINE**, a periodical which circulated widely throughout the northern states, and contained, besides the news of missionary work and revivals in this country, occasional letters from Dr. Carey and his associates in India. The editor, Thomas Baldwin, D. D., was himself a correspondent with Dr. Carey and leading men in England, such as Drs. Fuller and Ryland, and delighted to do all in his power to extend the interest in missions to pagan lands.

### *The Relation of Baptists*

He was ably seconded in his influence by Dr. Lucius Bolles, of Salem, Mass., who, in 1826, succeeded Dr. Staughton as secretary of our Baptist General Convention. At that time, also, the **BAPTIST MISSIONARY MAGAZINE** became the official organ of the foreign missionary society.

We would not assume in all that has been said that the missionary spirit was general in those early days. It is not universal even now. But men of faith and piety and enlarged views, in all denominations, were becoming interested in missions, so that when the young men of Andover actually placed their appeal before the General Association at Bradford, Mass., on June 28, 1810, a sufficient number of influential members were in sympathy with them to ensure the success of the project. The following day the first board of commissioners was elected, and thus the first foreign missionary society came into existence in our country. Enough has been said to indicate that although the Baptists were not immediately connected with this advance step on the part of their Congregational brethren, they had a profound interest in the undertaking and a real sympathy with the young men who were the occasion of it.

### An Unexpected Call

Not long before his departure from America, during a conversation with Dr.

Bolles, of Salem, Mr. Judson suggested to him the formation of a society among the Baptists of America for the support of foreign missions, in imitation of their English brethren. Little did he then "expect to be personally concerned in such an attempt," least of all to become the first missionary of the proposed society. The change of views, which, however, came to him and his wife, together with Luther Rice who had sailed about the same time, both of whom were in the early student movement, are well known. When the knowledge of their change of views reached this country it produced a remarkable impression. Although, as we have stated, there was a strong missionary sentiment in many of our churches and in the minds of some of our leading ministers, there was no general organization to unite our widely scattered forces. With no real knowledge of our strength we were scarcely prepared to attempt any important enterprise. "The change in sentiment in Messrs. Judson and Rice was just the event which was needed to rouse the Baptists to action and concentrate them upon one object, truly Christian in its essence and yet denominational in form. It was universally acknowledged that in this matter the providence of God had left us no option. Not to enter at once upon the work of missions would be to belie our profession as Christians and ex-

pose us to the scorn of the whole religious world.”\*

Societies in aid of foreign missions were immediately formed in many leading cities, and liberal contributions were made to their treasuries. A society formed in Boston, named the Society for Propagating the Gospel in India and other Foreign Parts, at once assumed the support of Mr. and Mrs. Judson. But they still clung to the English Baptists, thinking it might be wiser to continue to cooperate with them in the work at Serampore than to engage in an independent enterprise. But providential circumstances and the far-sightedness of our English brethren, who perceived that such a union would not be for the best interests of the cause in America, prevented any such joint action. After careful deliberation, therefore, a meeting was called in Philadelphia, and on May 18, 1814, was organized the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions. In 1826 the headquarters were removed to Boston, and in 1846 the name was changed to The American Baptist Missionary Union.

Under the blessing of God this organization has come to hold a leading place among similar societies throughout the world.

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\*Wayland's Life of Judson, which has been consulted freely in the preparation of this leaflet.

to the Haystack Centennial

According to recent statistics it holds the first place in the number of communicants in its churches in pagan lands, while it ranks seventh in the amount of annual income. There are today (1906) more than 550 missionaries engaged in its service, aided by 4,345 native workers. There are 1,238 organized churches, having on their rolls 130,902 members. Never in its history have the opportunities for enlargement been so numerous as today, nor the resources of the Church so abundant. All the circumstances seem to indicate that the next few years should witness a great advance in all lines of activity, both in relation to the interest at home and the actual work that is being done abroad. "We *can* do it if we *will*" is no less true today than one hundred years ago. God grant us the WILL TO DO.



